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ABSTRACT

The teaching of sex-role stereotyping issues in an educational psychology course for student teachers is discussed. Issues presented include influences on the learner, the teaching of sex roles and stereotypes in the elementary grades, the presence of role models at home and school, contributions of curriculum to sex-role stereotyping and the potential effects of sex-role stereotyping. Activities for students enrolled in the educational psychology course are described in terms of strategies for increasing individual awareness of sex-role stereotyping. (HLM)

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SEX-ROLES: Why, What, and How

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"Person-persons usually deliver the person at about eleven if they don't fall into person-holes." This piece of gibberish probably represents the ultimate in desexualizing our language, but it contributes little to demolishing sex-role stereotypes. It contributes even less to alerting prospective teachers to the ways in which their biases and behaviors in the area of sex differences affect, or will affect, those who they teach. Just as our students need to become sensitive to cultural differences, so too they need to be aware of how their own earlier experiences cause them to encourage or discourage specific behaviors as appropriate to one sex only. Where do we begin?

Influences on the Learner

In the educational psychology course, the prospective teacher is taught, among other things, that learners differ from one another. These differences arise from three major spheres of influence: developmental, environmental, and psychological. (Schwartz, 1977b) Development includes a consideration of the learner's genetic inheritance, physical health and growth from the prenatal period through childhood and adolescence, and sex differences. Environmental influences on the learner include parental and peer attitudes, ethnic/racial/cultural/socio-economic attitudes and practices, and images offered by the media, particularly television. Finally, the psychological influences on the learner are studied in terms of the growth of a self-concept, variations in motivation and anxiety, and emotional responses that affect learning. A course could be constructed just tying all of these factors to the development of sex-role differentiation and stereotypes. In effect, the highlights presented

here provide such a course in miniature.

Why should sex-role be such an important element in educational psychology? We are concerned with making our students aware of learner differences with which they must be prepared to cope in the future. The most basic difference between learners is that some are male and some are female. As Chafetz (1974) and others point out, this gender difference has also led to sex-role or masculinity/femininity differences. Children of each gender have been raised differently from the cradle, and may indeed have been welcomed differently at birth, depending upon the hopes and expectations of their parents.

Demonstration #1 therefore: ask students to interview their parents about their reactions to the student's sex at birth and later. What color was the nursery? What behaviors did the parents reinforce positively and negatively? What toys were bought? Or books? Which activities were encouraged? To what extent does the student feel that his/her present attitudes, behaviors, and goals have been affected by the foregoing?

After the influence of the home, children's sex-role behavior is affected by their teachers' attitudes and practices. What do they learn? Consider the implications of the following incident:

> A girl "came home from school one day stirred up by an incident that had occurred in her sixth-grade class. It seems that one classmate, Susie, had been tormenting another, Scott, by trying to kick him in the groin. In frustration, the boy turned on her and have her a whack. At that moment the teacher interrupted the fight to admonish the boy loudly: 'Scott, don't you know we <u>never</u> hit girls?'"
> (Tavris and Offir, p.162)

What messages were communicated by the teacher to Susie, Scott, and their

classmates? What other facts are needed? (In the narration of this incident, it is mentioned that Susie was half a head taller than Scott.)

Or, take a second incident ... When one of my sons was in third grade, he came home distressed and confused because only girls' papers were to be displayed at an upcoming school science fair. When I went to the fair, that was indeed the case. In questioning the teacher, I asked whether no boy's paper had been good enough to display. "Oh, some were very good," she responded, "but they were all too messy whereas the girls' papers were very neat." What message was communicated here?

Other examples of sex bias abound, with students able to recall some from their own experience. *Demonstration #2:* Relate three to five such incidents in paragraph form. After each paragraph, each student is to write in his/her reactions as a girl *and* as a boy involved in the event. General conclusions can then be stated, either in writing or as part of a class discussion. If our students can empathize with the students rather than the teacher in the incidents, they may be on the way to gaining the sensitivity they will need as teachers. The ability to put oneself in another person's shoes is an asset for everyone, teacher or not.

Teaching sex-role stereotypes

For several decades, the elementary school classroom has been a female province. The original thought may have been that the presence of a mother-surrogate in the lower grades eased the transition from home to school for children. The result has been, however, that feminine values have prevailed for both boys and girls, and that elementary school teaching itself has been viewed as an inappropriate role for males. Whether teachers "explicitly emphasize sex role distinctions by remarking on the qualities of girls in general

or boys in general, as well as by treating boys and girls in different ways" or "specifically punish out-of-sex role behavior and support in-role behaviors," or communicate their sex-role stereotypes more subtly, they are directing their pupils onto sex-typed paths. (Weitz, p.85) Too many teachers and counselors at all school levels, in one way or another still direct boys toward scientific and mathematical fields and girls toward languages and the arts as far as school-life goes. This not only perpetuates stereotypes, but also affects learning performance as the youngster exhibits lowered motivation for learning in the area that is not reinforced.

The myth of the fear of success in females, put forth by Horner (1969) and others, is yet another factor determining ultimate sex-role behavior. It stresses the importance of success for males and of sacrificing success for females because of the supposed costs of high achievement to the latter. Not only does this perpetuate sex-role stereotypes, but it communicates more subtly a negative message to males: "If the female did not withhold her talents, *you* would be second-best." In reality, moreover, not all women fear success. (Kaslow and Schwartz, 1978) Those who have achieved success can be used as role models for younger women, particularly those achievers who have combined marriage and career. This would include some of the teachers themselves.

Role Models

It should be mentioned that role models vary with the times, the culture, and socio-economic level. In past generations, fathers were viewed as autocrats - omnipotent, omniscient, and often remote from the daily life of the home and children. They rarely cooked or marketed for the family. That was women's work! Today, they frequently share the domestic tasks and even encourage their wives to pursue interests outside the home. *Kinder, kirche,*

und kuchen is no longer the sole guideline for the successful woman. Thus, today's children have quite different role models at home than we had or their parents had. These changes should be reflected in the schools as well.

Curriculum

In what ways does the curriculum contribute to sex-role stereotyping? Apart from the teacher biases already mentioned, course content is strongly male-oriented. Inventors, discoverers, winners are all male. The role of women in American or world history is distorted, neglected, or omitted altogether. Rarely does one learn in school of gifted women artists (e.g., Mary Cassatt), astronomers (Maria Mitchell), or authors (Willa Cather). The female is portrayed, when mentioned, as the helpmate, the mother, the sufferer.

In children's readers, with a few exceptions, the imbalance of male characters to female is often 5:1 or greater. (Weitzman and Rizzo) The content of the stories tends to be so stereotyped in terms of winners and losers, activities, and adult roles, that it is a wonder that anyone of either sex ever thinks to break out of the mold.

Demonstration #3: Have students examine critically their own literature, social studies, and psychology texts seeking mention of women. How many references are there? How many are positive? What images are presented? What inferences can be drawn? The students' findings can then be discussed in class.

Demonstration #4: Prepare a list of 40-50 occupations and ask students to associate them with males or females. Be sure to include some that are clearly neutral such as artist, elevator operator, teacher, and parent. After tallying the data, discuss the results. (If your students are serving as aides in schools,

perhaps they can obtain permission to do the same task with their 5th, or 8th, or 11th grade students. Comparisons of the data gathered should provide an interesting basis for class discussion.)

It is apparent from studies summarized by Ausubel (1968), Maccoby and Jacklin (1974), and others, that differences between the sexes in intellectual achievement are *in part* the result of socialization. Higher scores in language skills are often reported for girls, while the boys tend to score higher in science-math areas. There *is* a heavier emphasis on verbal development for girls in the United States which, combined with the effects of teacher expectations, can account for some of the differentiation.

In terms of creativity, there is similarly sex-role differentiation. Girls are reinforced for conformity; boys are encouraged to "tinker" with scientific apparatus or to solve problems. This pattern, too, is seen in textbooks. Generations of women have been taught that creativity is characteristic of males, but not females. They have been taught that intuition is feminine, but not important. They have rarely been given the opportunity to recognize or develop their creative potential. (Schwartz, 1977a)

Effects of stereotypy

What are the effects of teaching sex-role stereotypes? The girl can survive being a "tomboy" for several years and maintain her so-called masculine interests such as sports, spy stories, and science, but more than likely will succumb to sociocultural pressures by late adolescence and sublimate those interests within the sex role taught by her parents and teachers. The boy, however, even today, who does not enjoy those same interests risks being labeled a "sissy" or a "gay" from childhood on. Sex-role stereotyping is much more damaging for him.

As one of our Canadian colleagues has said, "Cooking can be as creative as carpentry, and handling a mixer can be as interesting as handling a saw; it is just a shame that the society in which we live has said to its girls, 'The mixer is for you, the saw for your brothers.'" (Shack, p.62) I would add that it is equally a shame when the reverse is said to the boys. It is increasingly common now, however, to find adolescents of both sexes in industrial arts and home economics classes. The joys of making book ends or a garment are not restricted by gender. Furthermore, the reality of contemporary adulthood is that both sexes need to be quiet at times, assertive at times, capable of following and of leading, conformist and non-conformist.

Sex-role instruction, explicit or subtle, also affects choice of future occupation. Although female professionals are very common in parts of Europe and in China, in the United States "females received 3.1 percent of the degrees awarded for dentistry in 1974-75, and 13.1 percent of those for medicine." (Eiden, 1976) The percentage is even lower for female engineering graduates. In higher education, recently published surveys indicate that only 7-8 percent of full professors are women, with a smaller percentage serving in the upper administrative ranks of public institutions. So often the female is discouraged from pursuing the studies leading to any of these professions on the grounds that such effort would jeopardize her chances for a happy marriage - still viewed as her only truly appropriate role. Other professions are considered female-role-appropriate: nursing, social work, classroom teaching, home economics. The same occupations are not perceived as role-appropriate for males, although many boys would profit from having a male teacher with whom to identify in the early grades, and many families would profit from interacting with a male social worker.

A few words should be included here about the effects of affirmative action programs. Hiring of an individual by label in order to meet quota demands, with minimal regard for qualifications, benefits no one and is as discriminatory and demeaning as the practice it is designed to correct. There are people of all backgrounds who can learn the skills needed to fill positions effectively - if they have not been taught that they are inferior or inappropriate by reason of gender.

Demonstration #5: Since this is a generation growing up with television, assign students, singly or in groups, to watch soap operas, kiddie cartoons, and prime time weekly programs for the purpose of ascertaining the sex-role stereotypes portrayed. Have them analyze the ways in which the appropriateness of sex-role behavior is communicated. A class debate can be organized if conflicting interpretations are offered. This can also be done with television commercials and printed advertisements.

End-Results

Our purpose in teaching about sex-role stereotyping in educational psychology, you will recall, is to sensitize the prospective teacher to this source of individual differences among learners. How do we know whether we have reached our goal? One of the ways to evaluate the impact of instruction in this area is to include one of the *Demonstrations* in a pretest at the outset of the course, and then to do a post-test after instruction. Another technique would be to solicit anecdotal material from the students' field or personal experiences regarding teacher perceptions of student behavior in terms of sex-appropriate behavior. Are the members of the class increasingly aware of the effects of remarks such as "Boys will be boys," or "What else can you expect from a girl?"

A second purpose of this unit of instruction is to demonstrate that males *and*

females can follow two careers - spouse/parent and occupational - successfully. The difficulties are greater for females because of sociocultural expectations and early role differentiation, but they can be overcome. The successful professional woman who is half of a dual-career marriage is often seen by her husband as a more stimulating person. (Nadelson and Eisenberg, 1977) She often has to work at more than one full-time job in the process, however. On the other hand, males should also be made aware that marriage and parenthood is a career for them, too. Both of these jobs require equal participation from both partners.

In recent years, we have witnessed the birth of many "consciousness-raising" programs. These have generally been focused on women's rights, teaching women to be more assertive, and offering women guidance for personal growth. To be quite fair, we should be raising the consciousness of *all* people to their right to function in the role that suits them best, not the one dictated by a gender-conscious culture.

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